Picnic

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by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Hannibal tries to apologize to Will after the whole BSHCI mess in Season 2. Could a special lunch and a quiet conversation be enough to do the impossible and bring them back together?

First in a new series of fics dedicated to fluffy tropes!

Will slipped off his jacket because it was inhospitably hot in his classroom, suffocating in fact. Unsure if the feeling came from environmental or internal circumstances, he groaned and rolled up the sleeves of his dark blue button up. Setting his glasses down on the desk, he took a moment to sigh with what had long since become a certain trademark Will Graham melancholy, aching ennui, with just that bitter edge that made it especially recognizable. How could he feel numb, yet be in excruciating emotional pain at the same time?

"Stupid Hannibal," he answered himself, the words muttered under his breath. Of course the reason was Hannibal. Like everything else. The source of all his problems was the same, much to his continued annoyance. *Humph.*

"Yes?" An unexpected, *very* unexpected and chipper voice piped up at the back of the room.

Will was sure he must have imagined it. In order to feed the hope that he had merely manifested the presence of his nemesis as another of his vivid waking (not fantasies!) nightmares, he let his eyes trail in slow, sullen dread up the rows of empty desks. Finally, his reluctant yet hungry gaze landed on Dr. Lecter, standing with a prim smile and rigidly correct posture, looking for all the world both pleased to see Will and…nervous.

"What?" Will furrowed his brow, scowling. Hard not to trust his empathy as it screamed to him of a bizarre sincerity emanating from the impromptu visitor. But he was going to have to learn not to follow his softer instincts. Look where that had gotten him so recently: a cold cell, solitary humiliation and despair, with a side order of the terrible prison food which Frederick Chilton provided, certainly because it was the cheapest he could possibly have delivered. *Never again.*

"I said, 'yes'? In response to your earlier remark about *'Stupid Hannibal*.'" Amusement glittered in dark amber eyes.

The room was dim, and Hannibal in his dapper, tan three piece suit with a purple paisley tie, was now the standout feature of an otherwise dull environment, Will included.

"You calling yourself stupid?" He stuffed a bunch of folders into his briefcase and in a pointed show of armor, put his glasses back on.

Slinging the bag over one shoulder, he took the stairs slowly but surely. He could simply evade the worst that this encounter might contain, after getting whatever useful clues about the Ripper's activities that might be on offer.

Because that was what he was *doing* by letting Hannibal back in his life. Honeytrapping him, being a good fisherman, choose your favorite metaphor, he hated Hannibal Lecter and every breath he took was about vengeance until he made that vengeance real. Dammit.

"No," Hannibal chuckled. "By most forms of assessment, I could never be considered less than a genius. However, you did say my name and in the moment I found it –"

"Insulting?" Will glared at the "genius."

He lingered halfway up the stairs with the unplanned impression that he was ascending to Hannibal, like a bride floating up to a groom. "Because that's how I meant it."

"I found it relieving," Hannibal corrected him. "If you are thinking about me resentfully, at least you are still thinking about me."

He mismatched so rudely with Will's glum, miserable collegiate meeting room that the agent resented the intrusion even more. An unfortunate reminder that he used to be excited when Hannibal showed up here.

He used to think about Hannibal driving an hour and a half out of his way only out of eagerness, concerned or intrigued, to see *him*.

Hannibal used to make him feel special and alive, but the second he figured out that his therapist and friend was only playing him, he felt invisible once again. Meaningless. Empty. Another trifling pawn in one of many, many games which the Ripper kept up in tandem for his own protection, entertainment and amusement.

And he didn't really care to be reminded of any of it, the feelings once bubbly inside him, making his heart skip a beat at the mere idea of handsome, brilliant Dr. Lecter carving out time just for him. Everything that had seemed so promising had now gone all sour and heavy.

Their fake friendship was nothing but expired, disgusting milk crusting over the facade of an uncomfortably tense supposed "truce" between them, and, and, and–

"Resentment?" He bit out at Hannibal when he finally reached the top of the stairs. His eyes bore into the older man like lasers of pure hatred. "You wish. You wouldn't want to hear my real opinion of you."

Hannibal's pupils dilated a little and he stepped back, averting his eyes, as if Will's intensity and focus on him had overwhelmed his senses.

"Or else you don't want me to hear it," the killer countered.

Can't you just fucking stop with that obnoxious habit of seeing right through me?

Talk about unnerving. So unused to being seen, it still made Will feel naked when Hannibal read him that easily.

"Guess I'm entitled to keep some secrets. After all, you've still got me beat on that count, times about a thousand, right?"

"Perhaps," said Hannibal softly, looking too much like a kicked puppy.

"You know, you don't really get to show up here pouting and making big doe eyes at me, as if I'm the one who screwed things up between us. Okay?" Will snapped.

He refused to feel guilty for his blunt negativity and he would *not* feel pity or any need to soothe the woes of a man who literally went around murdering innocent people and then fed

them to his friends as kabobs and curries.

And when Will even *thought* about the damn food puns that Hannibal had been making all along when they shared meals, he wanted to scream. What an egotistical *ass*. Proud of his evil crimes, even glowing with joy over them like some maniacal happy duckling.

“My facial expressions aside, I…can concede that I carry more blame for the damage done to our–”

“Concede?” Will repeated, exasperated. His bag almost slipped down his shoulder and he jerked back when Hannibal moved to help him grab it.

Adjusting the bag, he glared even harder at his frenemy. “More blame?”

“Would it make you feel better if I took all the blame, absolving you of any interest in murder, any instability or temptation in the matter?”

“I’m interested in murder. Solving murder is my job. Instability is basically my middle name, and you made it worse, so thanks a lot. Temptation? Ha!”

He put his hand on his hip, *not* to strike a sexy stance or show off his narrow waist and delicate hips. He wasn’t making his lips a little puffy and cute, either.

Just as he had *not* worn a neatly pressed, midnight blue shirt and black, equally well-ironed and very well-fitting trousers, sans tie and with his collar open, in case Hannibal did stop by, as he used to, by chance. He told himself that like his new haircut and how he kept it neatly combed off his brow, this was just ammunition for their cold war. The honey in the pot, of course. Nothing more.

“‘*The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful.*’”

“Who said that? Satan?”

“Oscar Wilde,” Hannibal replied crisply. “Now, have you eaten yet?”

Will looked at him as if he had grown five more heads and turned purple.

“Lunch?” Hannibal added helpfully.

“Why?” Will challenged, still surly.

“I hoped to make a peace offering.”

Hannibal picked up an object from the floor which Will hadn’t noticed, *not* because of silvered hair fanning an aristocratic forehead, dreamy maroon-brown eyes, kissable lips and a suit that made a certain someone’s body look heavenly. He’d obviously been distracted by anger and hatred.

The object in Hannibal's hand was a large basket. And the older man leaned down slightly, accentuating their small height difference in a way that seemed to expand it. With an indulgent, fond smile and a playful tone he asked, "And what do you think is in here?"

Sad but true, Will always found that this habit of teasing him with that parental attitude hit him square on in the daddy issues. The butterflies in his stomach had apparently not only awoken but taken several bumps of cocaine as a result. His skin tingled and he felt like a flustered, naive boy who ought to smile and play along, hoping for more special notice from his gorgeous, older crush.

What is wrong with me--

"First guess?" Will shrugged casually, shoving his real feelings deep down. "A human head." He lifted the flap of the basket and asked, "Jack, is that you?"

"Agent Crawford is quite intact, I assure you." Hannibal wasn't beaming hopefully at him anymore, but he hadn't let go of this weird ambitious outing yet, whatever its purpose (certainly nefarious). "I've packed a lovely lunch and hoped you might join me for a picnic at a nearby park."

Will huffed and rolled his eyes. He bashed his palm into the door to open it and let it swing shut, not holding it for Hannibal – that would show him –

Of course, Hannibal smoothly followed Will through the hallway and into the front foyer of the building, asking amusedly "Was that a yes?"

"Why the hell would I have a picnic with you, Dr. Lecter?" he asked irritably, shoving himself through the revolving door to the outside world.

This had been a bad choice; he felt dizzy when he was essentially shot onto the sunny sidewalk. The bright Spring day contrasted with the darker confines of the work building, and there were far too many people everywhere; serious students and frolicking, cheerfully chattering ones, agents and professors, everyone all around him with such horrible, loud cacophony of sound and light.

The butterflies in his stomach swooped upside down, still all worked up about Hannibal, and he thought he might faint. Scanning the environs for an obligingly safe patch of grass to land on, he froze stiffly when Hannibal's warm, strong arms appeared, framing him from behind and protectively preventing the fall.

"It's all too much, isn't it?" Hannibal asked gently.

So gently, and with his hug, nearly a hug anyway, tender and caring. Will wanted to burst into tears and possibly turn into that embrace and hold on tight, never let go. But Hannibal's comfort was poison, designed to trick him into another experiment of absurd trust. And Will couldn't be that idiotic twice.

"It is now," he muttered, wriggling free as a weight dragged his heart a thousand leagues under a sad sea.

He shook his head to clear it, causing his brunette curls to get messed up, clustering around his face as his cheeks flamed.

On the way to his car, he found himself once again, belief-defying as it was, trailed by the Chesapeake Ripper.

"Forgive the liberty, Will. I was only trying to–"

Will spun around to face the villain, noticing anew how he stood out, how he would always stand out anywhere, even in his own territory like a gallery or an opera or – whatever, a Florentine chapel. Hannibal was simply more beautiful than anything or anyone else, whether he was at the top of his confident game hosting a dinner party to Baltimore's elite, or standing in the parking lot of FBI's Quantico complex holding a picnic basket, casting a pleading gaze at Will, looking absolutely ridiculous. And beautiful. And stunning and bewitching.

"I don't care," he forced out, "What you're trying to do or what you just want me to think you're trying to do, I just want you to stop, okay? Okay?"

He really was going to cry or at least throw up if he didn't get away from Hannibal soon.

"I miss you. I miss…us. What would you have me do, Will?" Hannibal finally looked a bit stressed.

Great, Will spent every night crying crocodile tears and screaming into his pillow until he conked out from nothing but the biological necessity of a few hours' sleep and Hannibal finally looked a bit stressed!

"Take a long walk off a short cliff? Turn yourself in to Jack Crawford?"

"How dreadfully you play down your true feelings," Hannibal retorted firmly.

He stepped closer to Will. They were a few paces away from Will's car, and the profiler could have easily fled, then made a fast escape. Instead, he was glued to the pavement, staring at his former therapist. He suspected with some horror that his own eyes might be doe-like now.

Hannibal hesitated, apparently considering various things to say and rejecting several as not good enough.

"Tell me," he finally resumed, "if you could have anything you wanted from me, what would it be? Not what is right or what you should want, but what you actually desire."

"I'd want you to be sorry," Will said in a trembling voice. "And I'd want to believe that." His body was shaking with rage and something else he refused to put a name to. "Please, this is my work and you're embarrassing me. I'm making a fool of myself."

"You're doing no such thing. Your feelings aren't embarrassing." Hannibal looked at him then with such breathtaking kindness that Will really couldn't stand it.

"They certainly feel embarrassing." He rolled his eyes, but unlike the cynical way he'd done so earlier, this was one of those times he rolled his eyes to try and keep from crying.

"I wrote you a letter," said Hannibal in some kind of definitive way that baffled Will. "Would you give me one more chance to heal the wounds between us? We could have lunch together, and I could read you the letter, if you like."

"Well," Will said grumpily, unlocking his car with an anxious press to his keychain. He hated that it was this easy for Hannibal to break him down. So he really put his all into this particular round of glaring.

"Everybody's gotta eat," he added, and nodded at the Ripper to follow him to the car.

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"Is this a confession of your crimes?" Will inquired wryly.

Hannibal held the letter with a kind of delicate reverence.

"Some of them," he said, voice soft as a bruise that Will kept pressing merely by existing. "At any rate, it is certainly a confession."

Will took a few deep breaths and tried to center himself mindfully. He could get through this. Maybe he didn't know why he was there, exactly, but he could chalk it up to the undercover investigation and file any other feelings away to be dealt with never. Easy enough, right?

It was a splendid spring day, and the park seemed vividly alive and refreshed, washed all over with warm yellow sun-glow. Their picnic blanket was spread near a tree that gave welcome cover to the more aggressive heat that might otherwise give Will a headache. Flowers were blooming all over the field, and there were several other couples picnicking, everyone choosing a spot far enough away from other blankets to provide their romantic date that much-desired intimacy.

Will's heart squeezed at the realization they must look that way to the others, like a happy couple enjoying a lovely lunch in a beautiful place. Every time he thought he was over Hannibal and this sadness the killer had brought him, he learned that he was, well…no such thing.

So how could Hannibal say his feelings weren't embarrassing?

The conflicted profiler had never seen a picnic lunch quite like this. Against what seemed to be the rules of physics, Hannibal had produced a large cutting board from the basket and placed it on the blanket between them, then took out just so many tiny and intricately organized tupperwares. Soon Hannibal had created a magnificent charcuterie, with two huge bunches of grapes, green and red, tons of different fancy cheeses, plus crackers and mini bagels which Will knew he must have made himself.

Will chose not to offer any gratitude for the vegetarian fare, including smoked salmon and tuna salad that tasted too good to actually be damn tuna salad. But his stomach, quickly

satisfied by delectable morsels he almost crammed in to stave off his unbearably heightened emotions, felt grateful. The mid-afternoon hunger pangs (which he was used to as a habitual meal-forgetter) had only been making him slightly nauseated with the extra pressure of Hannibal's presence added on to the hollow way he felt inside.

Hannibal was waiting politely for Will to give the final signal of permission for this letter, whatever the hell – why had Will allowed this and what --

"Okay," he nodded, keeping a thoroughly cynical expression.

He downed the rest of his champagne from an exquisite crystal flute, which normally he'd say no one should bring on a picnic, but of course Hannibal had some of those fancy schmancy flute holding things to make sure they didn't fall over.

The drink was so wonderfully cold, tart but sweet and full of bubbles that made his eyes water slightly, made him want to smile instead of glower at Hannibal's antics, all his cute mannerisms, his snobby, particular ways.

"Dear Will," Hannibal began, glancing up at his companion before continuing.

For one moment Hannibal looked genuinely terrified. Will couldn't believe his eyes.

He blinked rapidly but the mirage never faded. Hannibal cleared his throat and continued earnestly, looking painfully handsome,

"Dear Will,
I intended to write you a simple letter of apology, but that was several attempts ago. There are crumpled letters all around my desk, enough to make a small book out of. And I still cannot summon the words to express my regret for what I have done to us both.

In saying the above, I am immediately assaulted with complaints from my ego and the defenses around my heart that were built so many years ago after the loss of my sister. I don't do this, Will, I don't lay my heart bare. I certainly do not apologize. I don't admit I was wrong, I don't make myself vulnerable. How did I get here? You're to blame, and yet I can only feel a strangely tormenting gratitude."

Another glance at Will, who was looking back intently. Hannibal tugged his shirt collar self-consciously. His words stumbled on the next paragraph and he had to go back and try again.

"I have been in…" He closed his eyes for a moment, breathing deeply. The letter made a small scratching noise as his fingers had started quivering and slightly clutching the delicate stationary.

"I have been in love with you from the moment we met," he managed, and then he read more quickly, obviously frantic after that admission.

Will's stomach somersaulted and his mouth dropped open in shock. Did he just say…? He felt his cheeks burning again and a wave of excited delight cascading through his whole being before he could stop it.

"And instead of telling you so, courting you properly as a gentleman should, I've toyed with your feelings, pulled you in just to push you away in the cruelest manner. Then I've had the nerve to feel offended by your subsequent rejections. It is I who stole the innocent affection from your beautiful eyes, and I who must accept the permanence of your disregard for me, if it is indeed implacable.

I wish that I could reveal my secrets to you in an honest conversation, and I dream you would accept me wholly if I had done it that way rather than the tiresome, destructive crusade of cruelty against you. That campaign has backfired, since the moment the lock closed on your cell, I wanted you back. I missed you terribly. Only in my solitude did I see the grave and possibly irreversible error of my selfish and frightened ways.

You did nothing to deserve my deception, manipulation and mean-spirited attacks on your public character, your feeling of stability in life, the way I tore the rug of our friendship away as if I was mocking you for caring. I want you to know that some of the lies and tricks were undertaken with a sincere wish to help you learn to know and love yourself, the dark as well as the light.

But we both know very well that many of my decisions were motivated by sadism and self-preservation. As to the sadistic, I did not find the satisfaction or the pleasure I thought I would derive from your seeming-defeat. Hurting you only hurt me more than I can describe. If there is a pleasure for either of us to feel from your pain at my hands, from this point forward it will only ever be with your consent and for your enjoyment.

I would be very good to you, if you will have me. I feel unusually humble when thinking of your smile and your bright eyes, your sad, aching laughter. I could kiss your sweet lips for a million years and crave nothing more than another kiss, another, another. My Will.

I won't insult either of us by claiming that life with me will be stable and safe, or that I am a good influence. There are any number of healthy, well-adjusted, kind and attractive people in this world who would be proud to have you as their partner, and I wish I could rip every single one of them limb from limb. However, I will not. (Unless someday you let me)

The point I am coming to, however circuitously, is that they can love you well and keep you secure, healthy, normal, or at least normal-passing. But beloved, no one in the world can adore you and truly understand you as I do. I've seen right to the core of your darkest urges, and that is when I loved you most. I know that you are bashful, that you feel awkward in this life and cringe from social encounters in result. I wish that you felt your worth, my angel. You're truly glorious."

Hannibal's voice stumbled again over a lump in his throat. His eyes were wet with tears. He was hoarse as he added, "If you could only give me one more chance to win you! You don't have to forgive me."

He looked down at his lap, at the blanket and over at the children playing frisbee down the hill by the water. A distant ferry sounded a clanging bell, and a mother was teaching her toddler daughter to walk, near the playground. She leaned down, holding the child's chubby, small hands in her own, afraid to let go, perhaps because the girl would inevitably fall a few

times, perhaps because she knew it was the first step in letting her go, which would continue in perpetuity.

"I've never been good at letting go," Hannibal said frankly. He wasn't reading the letter now, he couldn't get through another line of it.

Finally, he looked into Will's eyes, finding them as tear-filled as his own. "That's why I've always been determined never to fall in love. I love you and I can't, won't let you go. I think if you don't love me, too, I'll go mad. Perhaps if you just feel some twinge of caring for me, that will be enough to hold me together. You needn't forgive me, as I said, and I won't force you to be with me. But, please, I must know if my affections are returned even in some small part. Having done nothing to deserve that affection, or even your honest confession of it if it does exist…having done nothing but ensure your hatred, how can I–"

"You're such an idiot," Will said, still looking frustrated if not outright angry.

He laughed softly, looked up to the sky for a second, accusing whoever lived up there of total insanity for giving him this particular taste in men. For building Will like this, perfectly and specifically, because Will couldn't let go either. Even trying to avenge himself on Hannibal had been a way to stay close; he saw it now for what it was. And he saw himself for who he was.

"Pardon me," Hannibal stammered, "Please explain the context of that remark–"

"Okay." Will shook his head at Hannibal's overly florid speeches, how nervousness made his vocabulary even more pretentious.

He shifted quickly over to Hannibal's side of the blanket, then kissed him, a soft and gentle press of their lips. They drew back to look at each other, startled amber colliding into dreamy blue which no longer cloaked a love equally as dangerous, irrevocable and deep as Hannibal's own.

"Is the context clear enough now?" Will asked with a complicated smile.

"Yes, thank you. I've never been grateful to be called stupid and an idiot in the same day, but you do have a habit of tossing out my rulebook, darling."

"Hmm." Will considered this, still hovering with his lips under Hannibal's, in easy reach.

He reached for Hannibal's hands and laced their fingers together. Warm and stabilizing, scary, new and precious.

"Darling?" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes." Hannibal stared at him in wonderment, then lifted one of the hands clinging to his own and kissed it worshipfully. He had to be breathing in plenty of Will's soap and aftershave, that cheap piney stuff he claimed to hate, but if so, he sure seemed to like it a lot now. "Darling."

Then Hannibal leaned in slowly, eyes tracking up and down Will's face making sure the other man truly wished this to happen. Will's bashful smile said yes, so he kissed the profiler again, with more warmth and deepening ardor. Hannibal's lips felt exactly the way Will had fantasized them, soft, warm and skilled, only better, tasting now of champagne and nervous, mounting excitement.

Will had never done anything quite so bold, especially in public, but everything in him knew it was right, even the wrongness of it. All of his jagged puzzle pieces were slotted into the spaces of Hannibal's heart which had been waiting for this.

With a light but deliberate touch, he took hold of Hannibal's pristine tie and tugged, smiling. He laid down on the blanket, dragging the doctor down on top of him. Hannibal's response to this was eager as Will could have hoped, and amidst all the shy and fevered passion, the champagne flutes actually were knocked over, but neither of them cared.

Hannibal was kissing Will, and he could crave nothing else forever except another kiss, and then another and another.

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